

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 400 520

CS 012 630

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TITLE Reading Challenge: The Transition from Picture Books to Chapter Books. Instructional Resource No. 37.
INSTITUTION National Reading Research Center, Athens, GA.; National Reading Research Center, College Park, MD.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 96
CONTRACT 117A20007
NOTE 6p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Childrens Literature; *Fiction; Grade 3; *Picture Books; Primary Education; Program Descriptions; Program Effectiveness; *Reading Material Selection; Reading Programs

ABSTRACT

The Reading Challenge project was designed to help students make the transition from picture books to reading and choosing age-appropriate chapter books for recreational reading. This project was conducted throughout the school year with students rotating through different chapter books, usually completing 2 books and related activities each quarter. Based on student and parent surveys and discussions and teacher observations, the Reading Challenge project is successful. While this project was implemented with third-grade students, Reading Challenge is adaptable to different grade and ability levels. (A 24-item book list and a 22-item related picture book list are attached.) (Author/RS)

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Reading Challenge:

The Transition from Picture Books to Chapter Books



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National Reading Research Center

Instructional Resource No. 37

Fall 1996

Abstract. *The Reading Challenge project was designed to help students make the transition from picture books to reading and choosing age-appropriate chapter books for recreational reading. This project was conducted throughout the school year with students rotating through different chapter books, usually completing two books and related activities each quarter. While this project was implemented with third-grade students, Reading Challenge is adaptable to different grade and ability levels.*

Introduction

Do your children collect books like they collect trophies—displaying them on shelves to collect dust rather than reading them?

As teachers and parents, we were troubled by the observation that children were spending very little time reading books. When they did choose to read a book, they rarely completed it. This became even more of an issue as students moved from reading picture books to reading extended text. We wondered why this was occurring and began to evaluate our own families' lifestyles. We discovered many activities and distractions competed with the time we would like to commit to reading. After a busy, exhausting day at work and after school activities, there seemed to be little time or energy left for reading with our children. We then began to observe the lives of our students. We found that many parallel our own while others lacked the resources needed to provide opportunities to read books.

Rationale

The Reading Challenge project is designed to help students make the transition from picture books to reading and choosing age-appropriate chapter books for recreational reading. As teachers, we sometimes assume this is a natural transition, but our experience has shown this is not always the case. We wondered if guided, teacher-supported literature activities would increase student interest and confidence in reading extended text. We also

hoped to help students develop the ability to stick with and complete not only the reading of the book but activities associated with developing an understanding from the book. We have found that many students have difficulty making this transition. Some students seem to choose chapter books that are too difficult and pretend to read them just to be like other more advanced students. Other students often avoid selecting chapter books for recreational reading and instead choose books that can be read in one sitting. Based on our observations, there are times that this reluctance seems to come from a lack of confidence and knowledge of the students' own reading level rather than reading ability. This reluctance may also stem from lack of available structured reading time, both at home and at school. This project provides students with time, knowledge about the organization and appeal of shorter chapter books, structured choices, and guidance and assistance when needed.

Implementation

This project was conducted throughout the school year and students rotated through different chapter books, usually completing two books and activities each quarter. This project is adaptable to many different grade and ability levels. We worked with approximately 40 third-grade students of varying reading abilities divided into three heterogeneous groups. Each group met on a rotating basis with one of the two third-grade teachers or the media specialist. We gave a book talk about each of the three chapter-books to be used for that quarter and the students rated their preferences. We chose chapter books that were related to well-loved picture books and/or that were available in a series (see Book List section) so as to help students gain the confidence needed to select and complete chapter books on their own. For example, when beginning the chapter book *The Littles*, by John Peterson, which is about mouse-sized people

with tails who live in the houses of normal-sized people, we read the picture book *Tub People*. When the students had finished reading *The Littles*, other books in the series were made available for check out. Then we read *Teacher's Pet*, by Joanna Hurwitz. The story was introduced with the books, "First Grade...." Then the first book in the series, *Class Clown*, was read aloud in the classes to introduce the characters and the author.

Every effort was made to give students a first or second choice in order to provide student ownership in the project and motivation for the reading. The reading of the books was done during DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) time and sometimes during the group discussion time. During each rotation, the students were provided with classroom time for reading and completing assignments. We felt this was vital to students completing their books. Many students had not completed the reading of a chapter book before this project and most of the reading time modeled in school is the reading of stories or excerpts from books that can be completed in one sitting. In the past, during silent reading time, we often observed students reading books that could be completed quickly or returning books unfinished to the shelves.

Students could read independently, with a partner, in a small group or with a teacher. The group discussion time was held weekly and included discussion of the chapters read, activities both written and oral, responses to the book, vocabulary development, comprehension activities, and other various strategies appropriate to third-grade reading skills. Students were provided "buddies" (other students reading the same book or adult volunteers) who would help them with both the reading and the assignments, if needed. Upon completion of the book, the students worked on a culminating literature project promoting their book, which was presented to other students. In this way, students became book

guides for other students, supporting their independence and building connections with peers.

For 4 days of the week, the students worked during DEAR time (30–45 min) to read the assigned pages and complete their reading log assignment. This assignment usually consisted of inferential questions about the reading, vocabulary development (where the students found words to bring to the group), and some type of response about the reading, the author's style or the student's ideas. The students were encouraged to work with other students in their group, both for reading and responding. Some students chose reading aloud with partners or groups, while others chose silent reading. Struggling students were paired with partners or given teacher assistance. On Fridays, the groups met with the teacher or the media specialist to discuss the reading for the week, react to the plot, compare characters and develop understanding of vocabulary, and to prepare for the next week's reading. This weekly meeting lasted for about 1 hr.

The culminating literature activities included creating large-size characters out of construction paper, material scraps, and yarn; developing skits based on a chapter in the book; creating mobiles of the different parts of the story; constructing dioramas of the settings; and playing Battle of the Books, a competition where students are divided into teams based on books they had read. Before this, challenge questions about the stories were developed by the students. The teams worked cooperatively to answer each others' questions in a competition with the other teams. Students and teachers were impressed with how much students remembered about stories they read, even when readings had been completed months before.

Findings

Based on student and parent surveys and discussions and teacher observations, we felt

the Reading Challenge project was extremely successful. Listed below are some of our significant findings. Over the course of the year, most students' favorite books changed from picture books to chapter books they had read or heard read. During the initial survey, approximately 85% of the students reported a picture book or picture book author as being their favorite. On the end-of-the-year survey, approximately 70% of the students listed a chapter book or chapter book author as being their favorite. Students gained an awareness of authors as demonstrated in their interest in finding books in the media center by certain authors. Students began using the look-up stations in the media center to find books by certain authors or another book in a series they had already read. Students began to see chapter books as accessible reading choices as documented by the books checked out in the media center and by the many parents who reported that their children were interested in reading longer books after participation in Reading Challenge. One parent noted that her child was interested in longer stories with more interesting plots. Students enjoyed discovering and reporting that chapter books many times included more interesting character development, complex plot twists and increased suspense. As one student stated, "The chapter books are more exciting; when you have to stop, you don't want to because you want to see what happens."

One unexpected but welcome finding was that many students began to budget their time and pace themselves for long-term assignments. They began to see that reading a book did not have to be completed in one sitting and became competent at pacing themselves to complete the reading over a period of time. They learned to stick with the book and complete the reading and the activities. As one parent stated, "My child was learning to do some of the reading each day so it would be finished by the end of the week."

Book List

SHORT NOVELS

- Clyde Robert Bulla
Shoeshine Girl
Ann Cameron
Julian Stories
Julian Dream Doctor
More Julian Stories
Beverly Cleary
Ramona Quimby
Ramona Age 8
Debbie Dadey
& Marcia Thornton Jones
Genies Don't Ride Bicycles
Skeletons Don't Play Tubas
Zombies Don't Play Soccer
Betsy Duffey
The Boy in the Doghouse
John Reynolds Gardiner
Stone Fox
Joanna Hurwitz
Class Clown
Class President
Teacher's Pet
Aldo Applesauce
Barbara Park
Skinnybones
John Peterson
The Littles
The Littles' Birthday Party
Thomas Rockwell
How to Eat Fried Worms
Miriam Schlein
The Year of the Panda
Robert Kimmel Smith
The War with Grandpa
Chocolate Fever
Mildred Pitts Walter
Justin and the Best Biscuits
in the World
Gertrude Warren
The Boxcar Children Mysteries

RELATED PICTURE BOOKS

Julian, Dream Doctor:

- Lyle and the Birthday Party*—Waber
Mr. Rabbit and the Lovely Present—
Zolotow
Cricter—Ungerer
The Day Jimmy's Boa Ate the Wash—Noble

Teacher's Pet:

- Arthur's Teacher Trouble*—Brown
Teacher From the Black Lagoon—Thaler
The True Francine—Brown
Miss Nelson is Missing—Allard

The Littles:

- Thumbelina*—Hans Christian Anderson's
Fairy Tales
Tom Thumb—Watson
Clever Tom and the Leprechaun—Schute

The Year of the Panda:

- Milton the Early Riser*—Kraus
Pandas—Schlein
Giant Panda—Jin

The Boy in the Doghouse:

- Harry the Dirty Dog*—Zion
Harry by the Sea—Zion
Dog for a Day—Gackenbach
Caleb and Kate—Steig

Genies Don't Ride Bicycles:

- Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*—McVitty
Aladdin and the Enchanted Lamp—Mayer
Glenda Feathers Casts a Spell—Christelow
The Greyling—Yolen

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The work reported herein is a National Reading Research Project of the University of Georgia and University of Maryland. It was supported under the Educational Research and Development Centers Program (PR/AWARD NO. 417A20007) as administered by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. The findings and opinions expressed here do not necessarily reflect the position nor policies of the National Reading Research Center, the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, or the U.S. Department of Education.